

valuable tool, it can be costly and may raise some legal issues.

This bill would require that OPM conduct a comprehensive study on those issues and report back to the Congress. This one-time report would describe the current uses of social media postings for investigative purposes and any legal concerns or impediments that may arise. In addition, the report would summarize the results of any pilot programs on the use of social media conducted to date and provide cost estimates for implementing their widespread use in background investigative processes.

The report would greatly assist Congress, I believe, in determining whether further legislative action is needed when it comes to the Federal Government's use of social media in background investigations.

This bill was approved without opposition by our committee, the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, last year, and I certainly commend it to our colleagues today.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Mr. DESANTIS and Mr. LYNCH for their leadership on what I think is a commonsense measure that will actually improve the process.

Mr. Speaker, I urge every Member to support the bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BLUM. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. DESANTIS), the sponsor of this bill.

Mr. DESANTIS. Mr. Speaker, in the private sector, if an employer is going to hire somebody, a lot of times they will do a Google search, they will check social media postings to try to learn a little bit more about this prospective employee.

It may be hard to believe, but the Federal Government often fails to conduct a simple internet search on individuals before they are trusted with a security clearance.

Publicly available social media is one of the best ways to understand an individual's interests and intentions, but our investigatory process still focuses on interviewing the applicant's family, friends, and neighbors. For over a decade, various agencies, including the Office of Personnel Management, have conducted studies and pilot programs to assess the effectiveness of social media checks in security clearance investigations. Congress has not been provided those results.

What this bill will do is it will require these agencies to identify best practices so that we can use this going forward to make sure that the people who are employed by this government, armed with a security clearance, who have access to sensitive information that puts the security of the country at risk, that these are people whom we want to have there and they are not folks who have ulterior designs.

A lot of times it is going to be much more informative to look at their publicly available writings than to talk to somebody who may have lived next

door to them in an apartment 10 years ago.

I think that this bill is overdue.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Massachusetts (Mr. LYNCH) for co-sponsoring it for me, and I am proud to be here today as the sponsor. I think this should have bipartisan support. I think it will give us some good answers and we can move forward and modernize this process.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, we think this is a commonsense bill. I agree with the sentiments just expressed by our friend from Florida that, in today's day and age, we can't not take cognizance of social media, and it can be a useful tool in evaluating someone's security clearance application.

We also understand it could be a tool that is used to invade people's privacy, and we want to avoid that. That is why what this bill does is call for a report looking at all of the legal ramifications and the practicality of utilizing this tool to get to a better outcome in the process of security clearances.

Mr. Speaker, I support the bill and commend it to our colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BLUM. Mr. Speaker, I urge adoption of the bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. BLUM) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3737.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION EXTENSION ACT OF 2017

Mr. BLUM. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4043) to amend the Inspector General Act of 1978 to reauthorize the whistleblower protection program, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 4043

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Whistleblower Protection Extension Act of 2017".

SEC. 2. REAUTHORIZATION.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 3(d) of the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.) is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1)(C)—

(A) by redesignating clauses (i) and (ii) as subsections (I) and (II), respectively, and adjusting the margins accordingly;

(B) by striking "Ombudsman who shall educate agency employees—" and inserting the following: "Coordinator who shall—"

"(i) educate agency employees—";

(C) in subsection (I), as so redesignated, by striking "on retaliation" and inserting "against retaliation";

(D) in subclause (II), as so redesignated, by striking the period at the end and inserting the following: ", including—"

"(aa) the means by which employees may seek review of any allegation of reprisal, including the roles of the Office of the Inspector General, the Office of Special Counsel, the Merit Systems Protection Board, and any other relevant entities; and

"(bb) general information about the timeliness of such cases, the availability of any alternative dispute mechanisms, and avenues for potential relief;"; and

(E) by adding at the end the following:

"(ii) assist the Inspector General in promoting the timely and appropriate handling and consideration of protected disclosures and allegations of reprisal, to the extent practicable, by the Inspector General; and

"(iii) assist the Inspector General in facilitating communication and coordination with the Special Counsel, the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, the agency, Congress, and any other relevant entity regarding the timely and appropriate handling and consideration of protected disclosures, allegations of reprisal, and general matters regarding the implementation and administration of whistleblower protection laws, rules, and regulations.";

(2) in paragraph (2), by striking "Ombudsman" and inserting "Coordinator";

(3) by redesignating paragraph (3) as paragraph (4); and

(4) by inserting after paragraph (2) the following:

"(3) The Whistleblower Protection Coordinator shall have direct access to the Inspector General as needed to accomplish the requirements of this subsection."

(b) RESPONSIBILITIES OF CIGIE.—Section 11(c) of the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.) is amended by adding at the end the following:

"(5) ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES RELATING TO WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION.—The Council shall—

"(A) facilitate the work of the Whistleblower Protection Coordinators designated under section 3(d)(C); and

"(B) in consultation with the Office of Special Counsel and Whistleblower Protection Coordinators from the member offices of the Inspector General, develop best practices for coordination and communication in promoting the timely and appropriate handling and consideration of protected disclosures, allegations of reprisal, and general matters regarding the implementation and administration of whistleblower protection laws, in accordance with Federal law."

(c) REPORTING.—Section 5 of the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a), by amending paragraph (20) to read as follows:

"(20)(A) a detailed description of any instance of whistleblower retaliation, including information about the official found to have engaged in retaliation; and

"(B) what, if any, consequences the establishment actually imposed to hold the official described in subparagraph (A) accountable;"; and

(2) in subsection (b)—

(A) in paragraph (3)(D), by striking "and" at the end;

(B) by redesignating paragraph (4) as paragraph (5); and

(C) by inserting after paragraph (3) the following:

"(4) whether the establishment entered into a settlement agreement with the official described in subsection (a)(20)(A), which shall be reported regardless of any confidentiality agreement relating to the settlement agreement; and"

(d) REPEAL OF SUNSET.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Subsection (c) of section 117 of the Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act of 2012 (Public Law 112-199; 126 Stat. 1475) is repealed.

(2) RETROACTIVE EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendment made by paragraph (1) shall take effect on November 26, 2017.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. BLUM) and the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. CONNOLLY) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Iowa.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BLUM. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the bill under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Iowa?

There was no objection.

Mr. BLUM. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 4043, the Whistleblower Protection Extension Act, a bill I introduced with Ranking Member ELIJAH CUMMINGS.

The Whistleblower Protection Extension Act reauthorizes the whistleblower ombudsman program.

Whistleblowers are the front line of defense against waste, fraud, and abuse in the Federal Government, but too many Federal employees are unaware of the laws that protect them and the options available for dealing with retaliation and other actions intended to silence them.

To address this problem, Congress created the ombudsman program in 2012. The program directs agency inspectors general to designate an ombudsman for whistleblower protections at the agency. They provide information to employees on whistleblower protections and remedies in the event of retaliation.

This program was originally a component of the 2012 Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act and was set to expire after 5 years. Over the past 5 years, the ombudsman program has received high marks from the inspector general community. This benefits the country as a whole and makes the Federal Government more efficient. For that reason, it is imperative that we pass H.R. 4043 and make the ombudsman program permanent.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, the need for this bill comes into recent focus just today with reports, maybe unconfirmed, that one of the Trump Cabinet members is engaged in a witch hunt against a whistleblower. We need this kind of protection.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 4043, the Whistleblower Protection Extension Act.

Representative BLUM and Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Ranking Member ELIJAH CUMMINGS introduced this bill to extend the pilot program that requires every inspector general's office to have a liaison dedicated to assisting whistleblowers.

Under this legislation, the whistleblower protection coordinator would help educate agency employees about whistleblower protection laws. This bill would help employees who want to blow the whistle know their rights, and it would put agency management on notice that it is against the law to retaliate against whistleblowers.

This bill would require whistleblower protection coordinators to provide whistleblowers who have suffered retaliation information about options available to them to have their allegations evaluated.

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No matter how strong we make our whistleblower protection laws, they will not help if whistleblowers do not know how to exercise their rights under those laws.

I urge my colleagues to pass this bipartisan measure to strengthen whistleblower protections. I urge passage of this commonsense bill, this good government bill coming out of our committee. I thank my friend from Iowa for collaborating with the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) on this commonsense piece of legislation, and I urge its adoption.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BLUM. Mr. Speaker, I urge adoption of the bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. BLUM) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4043, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

ELIMINATING GOVERNMENT-FUNDED OIL-PAINTING ACT

Mr. BLUM. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (S. 188) to prohibit the use of Federal funds for the costs of painting portraits of officers and employees of the Federal Government, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

S. 188

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Eliminating Government-funded Oil-painting Act" or the "EGO Act".

SEC. 2. PROHIBITION ON USE OF FUNDS FOR PORTRAITS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter III of chapter 13 of title 31, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following:

“§ 1355. Prohibition on use of funds for portraits

“(a) No funds appropriated or otherwise made available to the Federal Government may be used to pay for the painting of a portrait of an officer or employee of the Federal Government, including the President, the Vice President, a Member of Congress, the head of an executive agency, or the head of an office of the legislative branch.

“(b) In this section—

“(1) the term ‘executive agency’ has the meaning given the term in section 133 of title 41; and

“(2) the term ‘Member of Congress’ includes a Delegate or Resident Commissioner to Congress.”.

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections for subchapter III of chapter 13 of title 31, United States Code, is amended by adding after the item relating to section 1354 the following new item:

“1355. Prohibition on use of funds for portraits.”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. BLUM) and the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. CONNOLLY) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Iowa.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BLUM. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on the bill under consideration, including an exchange of letters on the House companion bill, H.R. 1701, between the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and the Committee on House Administration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Iowa?

There was no objection.

Mr. BLUM. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of S. 188, the Eliminating Government-Funded Oil-Painting Act, a bill introduced by Senator BILL CASSIDY. In years past, the Federal Government spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on portraits of government officials. Taxpayer funds should be invested in programs that benefit taxpayers and our country, not oil paintings of Cabinet members to boost their egos.

That is why today we consider S. 188, the Eliminating Government-Funded Oil-Painting Act, otherwise known as the “EGO Act.” The EGO Act makes clear, once and for all, that government agencies cannot spend taxpayer dollars on oil paintings.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this commonsense, bipartisan legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM,

Washington, DC, December 6, 2017.

Hon. GREGG HARPER, Chairman, Committee on House Administration, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: On September 13, 2017, the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform ordered reported H.R. 1701,